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Fort Lennox



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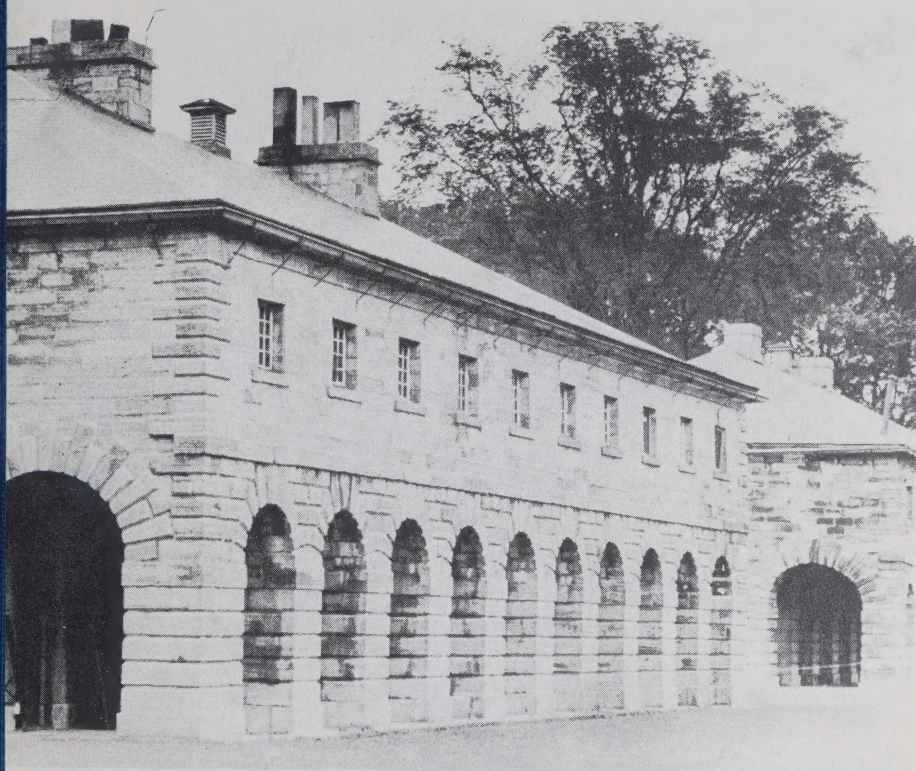






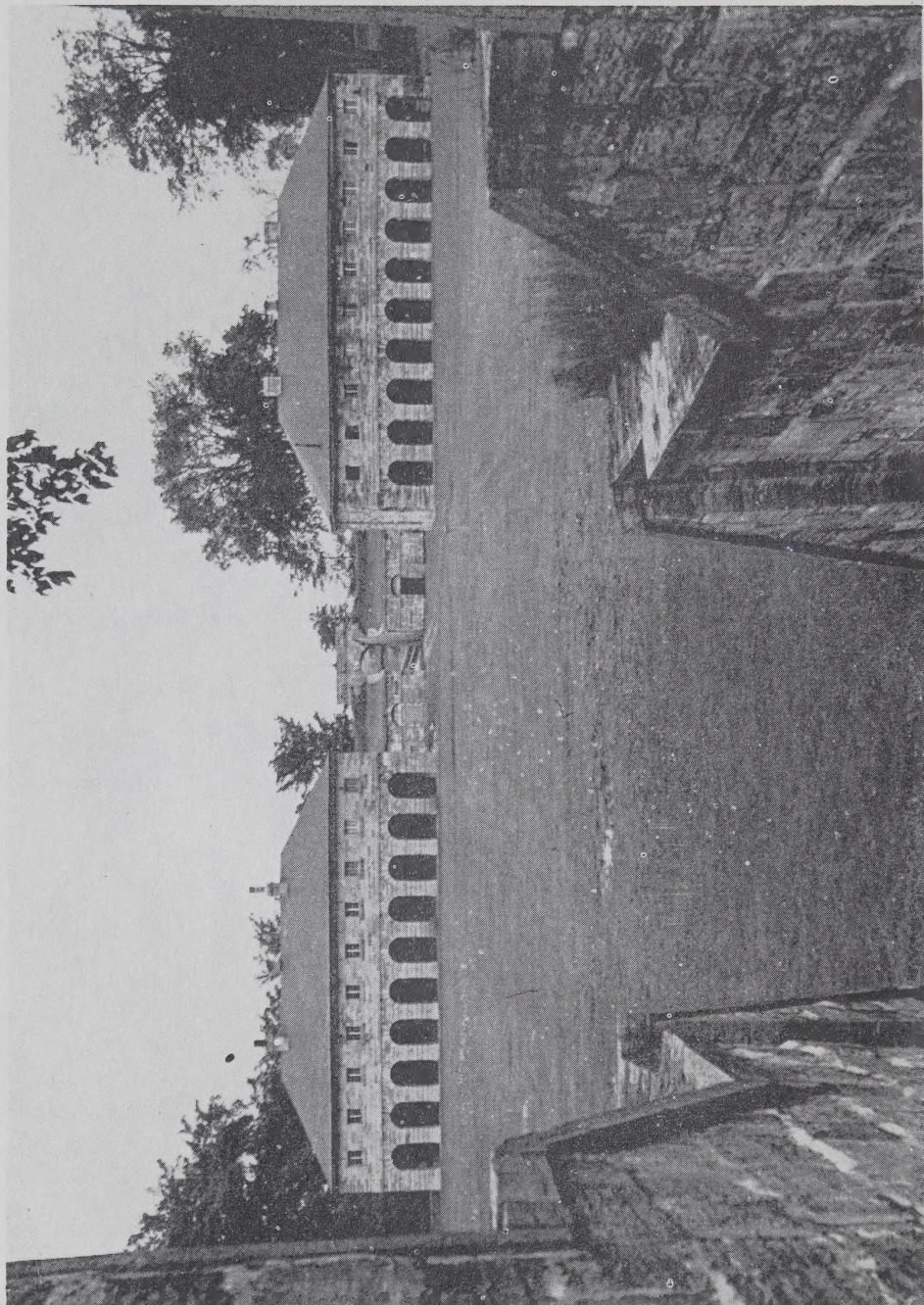
# Fort Lennox National Historic Park

Ile-aux-Noix, P.Q.



Issued under the authority of  
HONOURABLE ARTHUR LAING, P.C., M.P., B.S.A.,  
Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources





Fort Lennox National Historic Park



Ile-aux-Noix (Nut Island), an area of 210 acres in the Richelieu River, is named after the walnut trees that were once plentiful there. It originally was part of the seigneurie granted in 1733 to Pierre Jacques Payan de Noyan, sieur de Chavoie. The first occupant was a mustered-out soldier, Pierre Jourdanet, who leased the island in 1753 for the annual rent of one bag of walnuts.

The strategy of the generals of New France during the Seven Years' War was to fight a delaying action against the stronger British armies. In this way, they hoped to hold part of Canada until the war in Europe ended. The success of such a plan rested on the establishment of a series of strong defensive positions in depth. With these the French could force the advancing British into a number of time-consuming and costly sieges while at the same time preserving their own troops to fall back on progressively decreasing lines of supply to prepared positions.

On the Lake Champlain frontier, two French forts, Carillon (Ticonderoga) and St-Frédéric, were the advance outposts against an enemy push down the Richelieu River to Montreal and the St. Lawrence. However, because they were at the end of a very long supply line from Montreal, the French did not consider them capable of being held for long and had adopted a plan of abandoning and destroying them when the British attacked. The forts at St. Jean, Ste. Thérèse and Chambly were too distant to offer a rallying point for the retreating garrisons of the advance outposts so in May, 1759, Ile-aux-Noix was chosen as the site of a defensive position.

Ile-aux-Noix, sitting in the middle of the river only 12 miles from the outlet of Lake Champlain, had much to commend it strategically. Batteries mounted on the island could make it difficult for a British flotilla to pass the point. Chevalier de Lévis, who selected the location, planned entrenchments for 500 men and three batteries, one covering the southern approach, the other two dominating the swift, narrow channels of each side of the island.

However the island could be easily by-passed by troops moving overland and was vulnerable to bombardment by enemy batteries positioned on the banks of the river. Ile-aux-Noix required a large garrison to protect its flanks but New France did not have troops to spare in 1759.

At first only 130 men were provided for the garrison. A number of these were kept on patrol continually to check British attempts to slip small parties of men through on trails in the country on either side of the island, an infiltration which, had it proved successful, would have encouraged the British to by-pass Ile-aux-Noix with an army.

The constant patrolling and the unhealthy climate of the damp, marshy island reduced the number of soldiers who were able to construct fortifications and defend the island so the position was far from ready when Brigadier François de Bourlamaque arrived with 3,000 men on August 5 after Fort Carillon and Fort St-Frédéric had been given up. Only the latter had been evacuated and destroyed according to plan; a small force had been left to hold Carillon for at least two weeks but surrendered to the English in about a week.

Additional manpower and Bourlamaque's energetic leadership helped the progress of the defences at Ile-aux-Noix. One original idea that he put in practice was the construction of a log palisade between the shores of the river and

the island. Held in place by coffered, the palisade not only impeded the passage of hostile boats but also raised the level of the river sufficiently that many of the possible landing places on the shores were flooded and useless to an attacker. In fact, Bourtoulamque's ingenious defence work acted as a dam and caused the water in Lake Champlain to rise about three feet, causing some trouble for the English who were rebuilding Fort St-Frédéric and had to move their magazine to a higher and drier site.

By the end of November, a star-shaped fortification had been completed, covering about half the island. Behind earthworks, probably supported and strengthened here and there with logs, was a palisaded stockade surrounding the buildings in which the 300-man garrison lived. In the spring of 1760, the work of fortifying Ile-aux-Noix resumed under the direction of the new commander, Colonel Louis-Antoine de Bougainville. Hope of making the island strong enough to withstand a lengthy siege had been abandoned and the objective now was to fight only another delaying action against the British forces when they attacked.

The attack came in the summer. Colonel William de Haviland was placed in command of a force of 7,000 men with 40 cannon and instructed to capture Ile-aux-Noix and then move to the St. Lawrence where he would join up with two other British armies, one moving toward Montreal from Quebec, the other advancing on Montreal from Lake Ontario.

About two months before the main assault, Rogers' Rangers tried to by-pass Ile-aux-Noix and capture Fort St.-Jean by surprise. Intercepted by a patrol from Ile-aux-Noix on the first occasion, Major Robert Rogers reached his goal later and, finding it too well garrisoned for a surprise attack, chose Fort Ste.-Thérèse as an alternative. The Rangers managed to enter the fort without being observed and set it on fire. Then, in stolen boats, they made their escape pursued by French troops from Ile-aux-Noix.

On August 16, Colonel de Haviland landed his forces near the fort and set up batteries of cannon on each side of the river. Bougainville had about 70 guns to engage the British, some mounted on boats and floating platforms to protect the west channel of the river which was the only navigable channel during the summer. For four days and nights French and British exchanged cannonades. Finally, surrounded on three sides and running short of food, Bougainville complied with the order to evacuate that had been received from Governor Vaudreuil at Montreal. Under cover of darkness, he and the garrison left the island and reached the west shore of the river, leaving an officer and some soldiers to look after the wounded and provide covering fire to conceal the withdrawal. On August 28, Ile-aux-Noix surrendered. Bougainville and his men escaped to Montreal and laid down their arms with the rest of the French troops when New France capitulated on Sept. 8, 1760.

### **American Revolutionary War**

Under the British, the defences and buildings on Ile-aux-Noix were destroyed and the island was ignored until an American army under General Philip Schuyler invaded Canada and occupied Ile-aux-Noix on Sept. 5, 1775.

The Americans used the island as a base for their advance to the St.



Lawrence and the capture of Fort St-Jean, Fort Chambly and Montreal. Schuyler also had his headquarters on the island when he issued a proclamation inviting the people of Canada to join with the Americans and regain their "rights and freedom."

In the retreat from Quebec City, the beaten American army regrouped at Ile-aux-Noix. During the winter and spring of 1776, smallpox raged through the camp, taking 15 to 20 men a day. On June 29, the haggard militiamen from New England, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey left the island, most in boats but some on foot. Their sick comrades had been evacuated eight days earlier.

In July, the island was occupied by a detachment of Hessians and used as a supply base for the British fleet that destroyed the American fleet on Lake Champlain and commanded the lake for the remainder of the war. New fortifications were built and in 1782, 4000 troops began building stronger fortifications of stone under the direction of the outstanding British military engineer William Twiss. These ambitious works were never completed and after the war ended Ile-aux-Noix was forgotten about until the war of 1812.

## **War of 1812**

The present Fort Lennox dates from the War of 1812 when Ile-aux-Noix again became a naval base. The old fortifications were repaired and a shipyard, barracks, hospital and storehouses built. In April, 1814, the first ship to be built at Ile-aux-Noix, the "Niagara," later the "Linnet," 16 guns, was finished. Later, the largest warship on Lake Champlain, the "Confiance," a 1200-ton, 36-gun frigate, was launched hurriedly from Ile-aux-Noix, and with shipwrights still working on her, sailed off to meet defeat at the Battle of Plattsburg. Twelve more ships were built at the yard during the war.

Ile-aux-Noix, now the location of a vital shipyard, was not forgotten when hostilities ended this time. The British had the material resources to undertake the construction of the impregnable fortress that the French had dreamed of in 1759. Plans were drawn for a fort costing £86,726 and construction was carried out between 1819 and 1828. The fort was named after Charles Lennox, the Duke of Richmond, who, as Governor-General of Canada, had died in 1819.

The completion of the Chambly canal and a railway between St-Jean and Laprairie diminished the strategic value of Fort Lennox and in 1834 the naval station was closed. Thereafter, except for a brief period when the fort was garrisoned and used as prison for rebels during the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837, the fortifications were not maintained. One company of the Royal Canadian Rifles did garrison duty there from 1850 to 1857 and in 1858 the fort was used as a reformatory. When war with the northern states became a threat as a result of the British mailboat "Trent" being stopped and searched by a federal gunboat in 1861, British troops were rushed to Canada. Fort Lennox regained a garrison and the fort was restored. Its active status was short-lived, however; British troops withdrew from Canada in 1870. Fort Lennox became Canadian Government property but was used only briefly as a penitentiary before being established as a National Historic Park in 1921.

## Fort Lennox Today

The Fort Lennox of today, although showing many signs of its age, presents to the visitor an aspect of proud and magnificent solidity as if it had the power in itself to defy the disintegrating influences of time and weather.

At the entrance is a massive archway of great blocks of hewn stone on which is cut in large letters the name "Lennox". The gateway opens upon a spacious square on three sides of which are arranged the various buildings of the fort: officers' quarters, guard-house, canteen, barracks, a powder magazine and ordnance stores. The square, with its buildings, is surrounded by a steep rampart of earth which rises abruptly from the waters of a moat sixty feet wide and ten feet deep, running like a girdle around the whole structure.

The fortress stands at the south end of the island and occupies about one-quarter of the total area. Outside the fort may be seen graveyards and other ruins. On the west side of the island the first object of interest is the encircling moat 60 feet wide.

Entrance once was over a drawbridge, now replaced by a bridge. In front on the parade ground is a sundial erected in 1826. On the right are the officers' quarters and on the left the guardhouse. The guardhouse was built in 1824, and the officers' quarters in 1826. Within the latter building is the museum, containing a collection of historic relics with additions connected with the Great War. Behind the officers' quarters are various buildings, which were used for kitchen purposes. Farther to the right in the northwest bastion is the magazine where the ammunition was stored. The arch inside is four feet thick while the side walls are eight feet thick. Shell rooms were built on each end of the stone wall, separating the site of the magazine from the other buildings. Next on the west side are the men's barracks. Behind the barracks and under the ramparts are other buildings once used as bakeries.


On the south side there is a rally-port leading to a ravelin. On the east side are the artillery store, canteen and commissariat buildings.

About two hundred yards north of the entrance are two cemeteries enclosed by fences. The names of the soldiers who are buried there are preserved in the records. In some cases the original head-stones had disappeared and the memorials were renewed.

Near the western landing-place there is a large excavation which once served as a dry-dock. It is approximately 250 feet long by 50 feet wide with signs of an entrance from the river about 250 feet long by 25 feet wide. In the days of naval activity on the island the boats were brought into this enclosure, the gates closed and the water pumped out by hand.

*Single copies of this publication may be obtained at Fort Lennox National Historic Park, Ile-aux-Noix, Quebec, or the Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Ottawa.*





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DEPARTMENT OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND  
NATIONAL RESOURCES

ROGER DUHAMEL, F.R.S.C.  
QUEEN'S PRINTER AND CONTROLLER OF STATIONERY  
OTTAWA, 1966







